



Eyes on the Environment

Environmental Education & Tools for Broadcast Meteorologists

Most Americans believe they know more about the environment than they actually do: Just 12 percent can pass a basic quiz on energy awareness; about 80 percent are influenced by incorrect or outdated information; and only 41 percent could correctly define the term “watershed” in a multiple-choice format. To bridge this environmental information gap, the National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF), in partnership with the American Meteorological Society (AMS), looks to broadcast meteorologists – a trusted public source of daily scientific information.



The AMS foresees an evolution of the broadcast meteorologist to a designated “station scientist” who will expertly cover weather and environmental topics for their station. Local weather reports present a unique opportunity to increase the public’s understanding of complex natural systems, while conveying important information that is relevant to people’s daily lives.

To prepare meteorologists for this role, NEETF is developing environmental education and training materials, on-air environmental news stories, and Earth Gauge™, an environmental information service. Through the *Eyes on the Environment* efforts, NEETF and AMS will test how broadcast meteorology can improve Americans’ environmental knowledge and stewardship.

Beyond the Forecast

Although broadcast meteorologists are experts in the atmospheric sciences and the art of broadcasting, they have a more limited background in environmental science topics. NEETF, in partnership with the Cooperative Program for Operational Meteorology, Education, and Training (COMET®), is developing a set of online courses with a strong relationship to ongoing weather reporting. Course content will not only give broadcast meteorologists a solid background in environmental topics such as watersheds/water quality and airsheds/air quality, but will also provide tools and resources to enhance their ability to “tell the story” to their viewers.

Our first course, released in September 2006, focuses on watersheds and will use simple analogies and easy-to-apply demonstrations to impart the skills needed to easily explain:



- What a watershed is;
- How watershed processes work;
- How problems in a watershed develop;
- Links between fundamental concepts and topics currently covered on the air.

The course will be housed on COMET’s MetEd Web site (meted.ucar.edu/broadcastmet.php), along with other resources to help meteorologists move beyond the forecast, and will be part of AMS’s continuing education program for broadcast meteorologists.

Reaching Millions of Viewers

In 2002, NEETF tested the “station scientist” concept with Chief Meteorologist Bob Ryan at WRC-TV in Washington, DC. Working with StormCenter Communications, we developed a comprehensive Web site, wrc.iewatershed.com, about the Chesapeake Bay Watershed – *Watersheds: Where the Atmosphere Meets the Earth*. The Web site is embedded in WRC’s Web site, and has served as a source of background information for more than 30 on-air stories mentioned by the WRC weather team.



Based on the success of the WRC pilot, StormCenter has expanded the project to other media markets, including Austin, TX, Minneapolis, MN, Mobile and Montgomery, AL, New Orleans, LA, Philadelphia, PA, and Tampa, FL. These cities are reaching millions of viewers with weekly information about their local watersheds, and StormCenter expects to add several additional sites in 2006. The projects have been developed in collaboration with a broad range of federal, state and local governments, as well as local academic, scientific, and environmental organizations.

Earth Gauge™: Making it Onto the Airwaves



The Challenge: Breaking through the overwhelmed news agenda of the average TV station to incorporate environmental information in the weathercast.

The Solution: *Earth Gauge™*, a free environmental information service for broadcast meteorologists, tied to the 3-5 day forecast in cities across the U.S.

NEETF is working with national, regional, and local agencies and organizations to develop an index of weather conditions, their environmental implications, and viewer actions tips. *Earth Gauge™* information is e-mailed to broadcasters weekly, and designed to make it easy to explain the implications of weather events on-air. For example:

Winter Wings (Northeast)

Bird feeders tend to be busiest during cold weather spells – especially in the early morning and late afternoon. During winter chills, natural food and water supplies for wildlife are often scarce.

Viewer Tip: Help local birds by providing a feeder in your yard with high-calorie suet or black-oil sunflower seeds, which provide energy to stay warm. Adding a heated bird bath to your yard will supply much-needed drinking and bathing water. Place feeders near your home for easy viewing!

Earth Gauge™ information is distributed in partnership with AMS, The Weather Channel, and 62 local TV stations around the country. Visit www.earthgauge.net for more information.

Organizational Background



The National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF) is a private nonprofit organization, chartered by Congress in 1990, and dedicated to advancing environmental literacy in its many forms. NEETF works towards an environmentally literate society, creating healthy, sustainable, and prospering communities. We believe that the environment plays a role in all aspects of our lives; where we work, play, and live. We offer programs that give business leaders, government agencies, weathercasters, health care providers, teachers, and the average citizen the information they need to become an environmentally literate citizenry, so they can make a better impact on their community and our world.



The American Meteorological Society (AMS) is the world’s premier scientific and professional organization for weather. With more than 11,000 members, the Society promotes the development and dissemination of information on atmospheric, oceanic, and hydrologic sciences. The Society publishes nine well-respected journals, sponsors scientific conferences, and supports public education programs across the country.